

St. Michael's

University of St. Michael's College Alumni Newsletter

Special Edition, Fall 1986



JOHN MICHAEL KELLY, C.S.B. 1911—1986

Fr. John Kelly was for decades the centre of St. Michael's Homecoming and Spring reunions. We gathered with him and around him and other friends and remembered. In October of 1985 he attended his last reunion. The effects of the advanced emphysema made it impossible for him to be present in the spring of '86, but some returning alumni were able to visit him briefly at that time or send him notes in the Basilian residence infirmary at St. Basil's College on campus. He died before the Homecoming reunion of 1986 and indeed his wake and funeral services were wonderful reunion experiences. In death, as so often in life, he again gathered St. Michael's Alumni, students, faculty, staff and friends together — this time to remember and to give thanks for his great gift of life. The sorrowful yet hopeful spirit of those days of wake and funeral was symbolized for many by the appearance during the Mass of Resurrection of a beautiful butterfly with large purple wings bordered in gold. Monsignor Peter Sommerville's comment puts it quite simply: "Any butterfly is a symbol of new life, this one is called the mourning cloak."



The Alumni Board hopes this memorial issue of the Newsletter will prove not only a tribute to Fr. John Kelly but also a memory of a rich priestly life that was, and is, a source of strength and hope to each of us.

An Evening in Honour of John M. Kelly, C.S.B.

May 25, 1978

On the occasion of his being granted the degree, Doctor of Laws *Honoris Causa* by the University of Toronto, May 25, 1978.



The many faces of Father John Kelly, C.S.B.



Father Joe Dorsey's Poignant Wake Homily

It is most appropriate that we celebrate the wake service for Father John Michael Kelly on the feast day of St. Michael at St. Michael's College, the patron feast of the first foundation of the Basilian Fathers in Canada. Father John Kelly spent more than fifty years of his life here.

We are gathered here—his family, his confreres, colleagues, students, alumni and friends—to share together our sorrow and the deep pain of his loss, for we have lost a great friend and a great priest. But the sorrow is only ours, for if we reflect for a moment we will realize the great joy that his faith in God brings to John Michael Kelly.

I know no one who loved his God more fiercely and more truly than John, though he would be angry with me for expressing it in those terms. During the 1970's I heard him say often, "all they want to talk about today is this damn love." Love was too intimate a subject and the love for God too overwhelming a concept for this Irishman to suffer glib and casual talk. He had a philosopher's intuitive appreciation and admiration for the immensity of God's infinite Being, and similarly some fine grasp of the nothingness of man in relation to God.

One Sunday evening at Vespers here in St. Basil's Church in the 1950's he preached on "God the Creator." Solemnly he said, "God had absolutely no need for us; there is no reason for us to exist." And then in his magnificent voice he thundered, "but we are!" The triumphant ring of his voice and the glowing smile that accompanied the words spoke volumes for John Kelly's basic outlook on life, he had expressed his fundamental faith-belief, awe, amazement and wonder at the greatness of God's Being, and blunt, honest appreciation for His gratuitous gift of His life to His natural creatures.

John was more than fully satisfied and happy to be just a creature of such a God, to be able to worship Him, to praise Him, and to thank Him for the gift of life. He could not speak of love. And besides, he knew that by a similar act of God's gratuitous gifts, and for no reason or merit of his own John



Fr. Kelly and friends at Fr. Shook's 1985 Anniversary of Ordination.

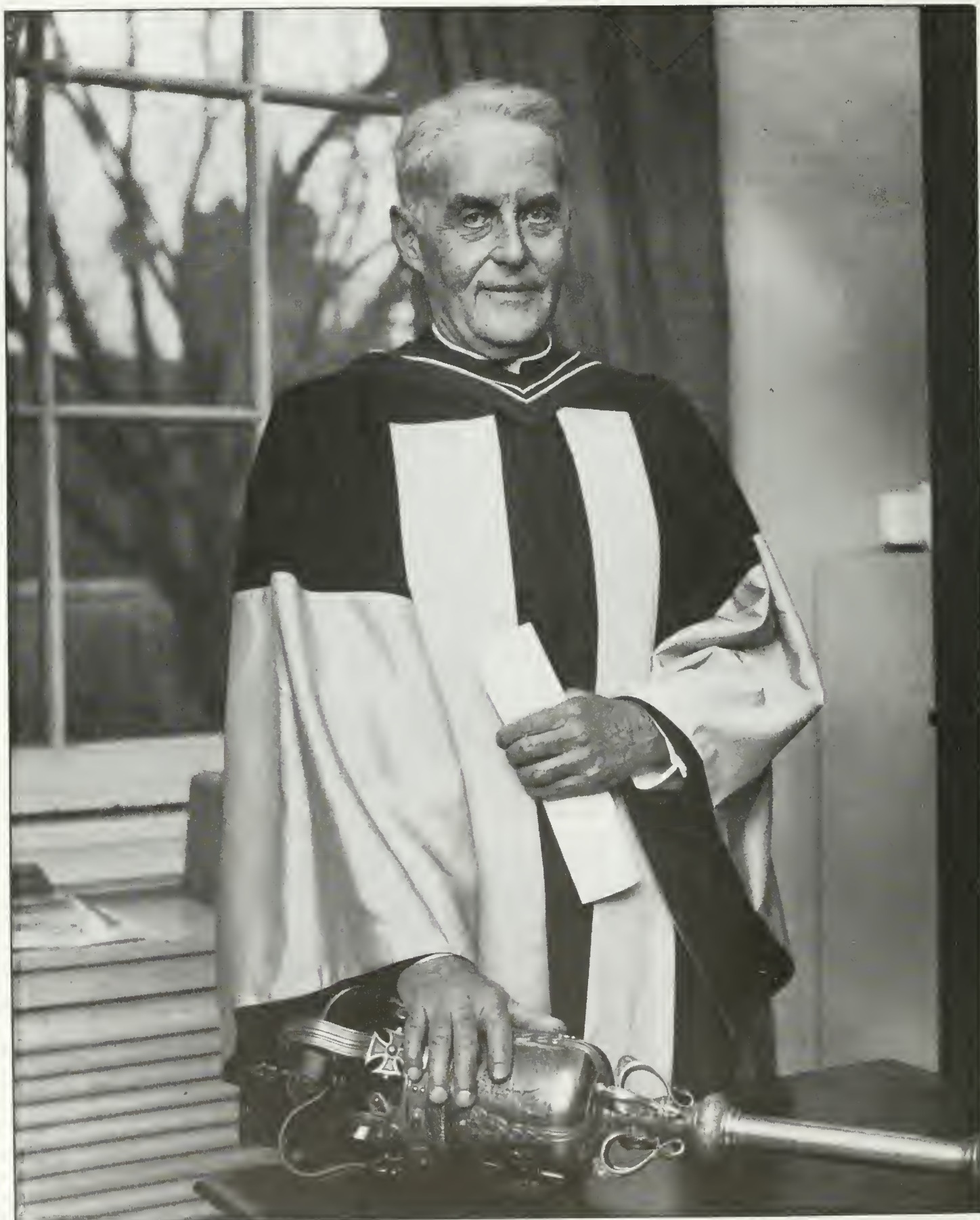
Michael Kelly was one of God's priests. He could therefore worship God by giving his life and strength and talents fully in the service of God to His fellow creatures. I put those two things together—John's worship of God by recognizing the dimensions of his creaturehood and serving the people of God in his ministry of priest and I see it as his love song to God.

His impatience with any casual attitude towards God was seen again in a sermon at a Bacclaureate Mass at St. John Fisher College in the 1970's. He declared there that "the heresy of the modern world is the heresy of the Will!" Truth, he went on to explain, must be sought with humility and requires very hard work. Modern people do not accept humility and they are impatient of hard work, so they decide what they want to believe and think they can will it to be true. For him this heresy lies at the root of the violence, terror, greed and immorality of our world.

Two weeks ago today I visited John at his brother-in-law's home in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He was completely at peace, more tranquil than I had ever remembered him to be, without anger or hostility, patient and totally calm. His mind was untouched by his illness as he displayed in giving me a detailed and rhapsodic evaluation of the Pope's recent encyclical on the Holy Spirit—"I think it is the most important encyclical of the 20th century." He also told me quietly and firmly without the slightest nuance of anxiety or

distress or fear, "I sincerely believe that I won't live more than a few weeks." And when we sat around the dining room table to offer the Mass he introduced the celebration with a brilliant and warm discourse on "the sublimity of the Divine Action in the Sacrifice of the Mass." My only thought during all this was "What a way to spend your time preparing for death! An intelligent man, of profound faith, humbly accepting the finite imperfections of creaturehood, full of praise for the Spirit of God, grateful—without any complaints—for the gratuitous greatness of God to him." I think of all his titles—Congregation of St. Basil, Order of Canada (he was so pleased that his adopted country thought enough of his service to its people to confer such an award), Doctor of Philosophy, Laws, Literature and Divinity—all of them truly earned and I am happy about them as he was. But I think that if he could choose his own accolade, he would say, "John Michael Kelly, by an infinite act of God's power and goodness, God's creature and His priest."





Investiture of Fr. John Kelly as an Officer in the Order of Canada, April 11, 1984.

"Blunt, Realistic, Unassuming" *Homily said*

by Fr. Robert Madden, C.S.B., at Father Kelly's Funeral Mass

Your Eminence Cardinal Carter, Your Eminence Cardinal Flahiff, Your Grace Archbishop Ambrozic, Your Excellencies Bishop Wahl, Bishop Tonnos, Bishop LaRocque, Bishop O'Mara, members of the Kelly family, Mr. Balfour, Chairman of the Governing Council of the University of Toronto, representatives of the University of Toronto and her federated universities, friends and admirers of Father John Kelly:

Although he had been suffering the effects of advanced emphysema for some months, death came mercifully and quickly on Friday, September 26 to Fr. John Kelly in the home of his brother-in-law and dear friend Jimmy Biglin, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the state in which he was born. He had been there since July 24, at which time he had finished with some meetings he had been asked to attend about College business, and his doctors had said he could travel. For the previous two months he had been in St. Basil's residence on St. Joseph Street where, after consultation with his doctors, he reluctantly went in order to receive fuller health care and to begin using oxygen to ease his breathing; he had to continue on oxygen steadily until the end.

Thursday, the 25th of September, was a difficult day for him and he spent a restless night. On Friday morning he could take only two spoonfuls of the cereal Jimmy prepared for him each morning; for the rest of the day he took only milk. In the late afternoon he sat on the porch for a while and then was assisted to his room, where he sat on the edge of the bed for quite some time. About 9:30 P.M. he came to the dining room table and while seated there with Jimmy, his heart gave out. Efforts at resuscitation failed and he was pronounced dead at 10:37 P.M. in the local hospital. It is a death which took from each of us in particular ways a great friend, admired colleague, respected confrere—an exemplary priest—a good man.

Now what do we say? Yesterday I imagined myself going to his room on the second floor of the old Clover Hill

building, just down the hall from this church, as I and many of us often did when he was alive when we wanted his advice or needed his help. In answer to my knock came the brusque "Come in!" that had welcomed so many for so many years. I entered, and there he was, seated in the worn, black lazy-boy chair in that simplest of rooms where he had spent countless hours night after night, thinking and planning and, yes, at times plotting ways and means by which this college could flourish and ever better serve the Church's mission to higher education. He pulled the straight backed wooden chair from the old desk for me. I said "Kel, what do you want me to say?" He answered without a moment's pause, "Madden, you are there to bury me, not to praise me." Not much help—but then, is that answer he gave me not just like the man, Fr. John Kelly? Blunt, realistic, humble, unassuming?

He did not do what he did that he might be known and praised—he did all he did that God might be known and praised.

To review his life is an exercise in wonder—he did so much; he accomplished so much; many of those accomplishments have been noted in the press; a doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Toronto, earned while he was also teaching part-time and then full time; professor of philosophy; Chairman of the Philosophy Department for 11 years, President of St. Michael's for 20 years, Director of Alumni Affairs and Development for 29 years, member of the University Senate, the Governing Council of the University and some of their most important committees, often acting as chairman; six honorary doctorates, medals of honour awarded by several institutions, and an Officer of the Order of Canada for, among other reasons, his service to education, his role as advisor to the Minister of Correctional Services and for his work with the medical profession.

These are significant honours, and he welcomed them—not because of the honour they brought him but

because of the honour they brought to the work of the Church, of St. Michael's, of the Basilian Fathers. But we know that these honours bear witness to his many talents and his fruitful use of them. He would be quick to say that what talents he had were given by God, and he would be judged on what he did with them.

John Kelly believed in a personal, final judgement by God, not only because it is revealed in Scripture and taught by the Church, but also because he believed that each individual life has the dignity and importance that warrants God's judgement. No human life was trivial or meaningless to him. His respect for the dignity of human life, at every stage, was profound, as his well-known and forcefully expressed views on capital punishment and abortion make clear. He took life seriously; he saw and, at times with a vigour and style not unlike another Irishman, Jonathan Swift, reacted against forces and actions that demeaned human life. When he thought people were doing unenlightened things he would tell them so—he said yes when he meant yes—he said no when he meant no, and loudly; it was one of the traits that made him a good friend—as well as very challenging company.

Fr. Kelly took life seriously because it was God-given—it was a share in being, granted to us by the Supreme Being, the Author of all being—a great blessing that was never to end, for all human life is destined for eternal union with the Creator. Because he took life seriously he took great joy in it; he charged into life as he charged into a classroom, or charged across Queen's Park, white hair bouncing, to charge into a university meeting. The joy in life you could hear in his laugh and see in his eyes and his smile and made him playful and gave him a heartening exuberance which, although not always observable, provided delight and entertainment to his family and many of his friends. There are many memories of this exuberance; one I cherish is of a 10 day holiday that four of us from the Basilian community took in a cottage on

the Miramichi some 15 years ago. John loved lobster and we bought some, fresh from the sea, but could find no tools with which to crack the shells. We explained our predicament to a neighbour and were given what she used—a hammer. Three of us sat at the dining room table while John, armed with hammer, prepared the meal in the kitchen—there was a crash and bits of lobster shell sailed through the dining room into the living room; lobster fluid ran down the kitchen walls, hung from the ceiling and dripped steadily from those bushy Kelly eyebrows. We also played golf—once; and his commentary on the conduct of the golfball made the trees in the rough (where he spent a good deal of the time) resound.

No one could doubt that John Michael Kelly was Irish—he was proud of that heritage and proud of the family through which that heritage and his Faith had come to him. Each year he would visit them, often bringing other priests with him to enjoy the hospitality and good times of the Kelly household. He reminisced with affection, appreciation and witty candour about his early years in Scranton with his parents, his sister and his four brothers. Dr. Larry Lynch recorded two instances of this when he presented Fr. Kelly for the honorary doctorate at the University of Toronto: He quoted Fr. Kelly as saying:

although the smallest of the family, I could certainly handle my brothers.

and again,

I was never an altar boy. Two of my brothers were, though, and one day they got into a fight right in the sanctuary, with my uncle saying Mass. My parents decided not to let me repeat the performance.

Dr. Lynch went on to say that the moral of the story is, in his words, "that John Kelly was Irish, with all that implies!" He was an explosive personality, and that, among other characteristics, made him exciting company.

Fr. Kelly was the first to acknowledge he had faults. This self-knowledge, this recognition of the frailty of his own human nature, joined with his concern and respect for individuals and empowered by the grace of God, made him a much



sought after and effective counsellor—one to whom people in trouble, or troubled, could go, sure of being heard with patience, compassion, understanding, and, when necessary, helped in an active way—his love was not often expressed in words, but always in deeds. It is for this that he will be remembered by many. It was that humanity, compassion and zeal for souls, again joined with God's grace, at work when, in the early 1950s he ministered to the two men condemned to be hanged for murder, about which events Fr. Dorsey spoke last evening.

Although he was never an altar boy in his youth, a central desire of John Kelly is expressed in our responsorial psalm tonight:

There is one thing I ask of the Lord.

For this I long.

To live in the house of the Lord

All the days of my life.

The house of the Lord was for him the Roman Catholic Church; those who did not know this did not know the complete John Kelly. His loyalty, fidelity, and devotion to the Church and the Faith he received from God through her, were at the centre of his life. At one level his Faith was the Faith he had experienced and learned in his home in Scranton—at another level that same Faith was a vision of reality that was the result of God's free gift and the work of his own gifted intellect struggling for an ever fuller understanding, however necessarily inadequate, of the mystery of God. The science of sacred theology was of great importance to him, as an intellectual, as an educator, as a priest, and as a university administrator. In no

small measure is the place that theology holds today in St. Michael's and the University of Toronto owing to his interest and support.

His views about the place, purpose and nature of theology in the Roman Catholic Church were made forcefully clear in his address to Convocation in 1977:

Theology, once laid claim to the title of wisdom, one of those functions was that of putting things in order. St. Michael's needs theology, but not a theology which speaks only with an uncertain voice. We must know who and what we are and uncertainty does not breed a sense of identity.

Few could accuse him of speaking with an uncertain voice.

Many of his most strongly held convictions were based on his faith and the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, but his convictions were not smug, nor did they result in close-mindedness or bigotry, as can be seen in his remarks on the occasion of receiving the honorary Doctorate of Divinity from St. Michael's in this Church in 1982, the same Church in which he was ordained in December, 1936:

Theology, he said, must be pursued with the highest possible measure of self-criticism and willingness to learn from others. After all, theology is about God. No one 'owns' God and God can reveal himself in many ways and through many people.

How fitting that to honour his 20 years as president, the St. Michael's Alumni established the annual Kelly Lecture in Theology.

He is proof that one who is totally committed to one particular Christian Church can play a significant role in ecumenical and inter-faith efforts. His work in the establishment, development and financing of one of the great ecumenical endeavours in North America, the Toronto School of Theology, is well known. Perhaps not many know that it was he who felt that the opportunities for dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholics presented at the St. Basil symposium here in 1979 should be pursued and to this end he encouraged and assisted Fr. Robert Barringer in establishing the St. Peter and St. Andrew Lectures. (It is interesting to note that in the Orthodox Church September 26, the day of his death, is the feast of St. John the Apostle.) When Professor Wm. Dunphy, Principal of St. Michael's College, became involved in planning a Christian-Jewish dialogue, it was Fr. Kelly who encouraged him in the venture and offered the facilities of St. Michael's for the meetings of the leaders of these religious groups—these meetings continue to be held here after 14 years. Again, Fr. Kelly was a man of deeds not just words.

We are all aware of the expansion that took place at St. Michael's during his presidency; student enrollment trebled, faculty and staff increased, new programmes were initiated, buildings were built, extended or acquired. If you are looking for monuments to Fr. John Kelly you could look at all that. He was proud of these advances, but the more important monuments to John Kelly are the lives, the hearts, the intellects, the Faith of the thousands he touched and influenced by his priestly ministry and faith-founded personality. In 1982, when he received the honorary doctorate of divinity from St. Michael's, he was presented with a plaque from young St. Michael's Alumni—none of whom he had ever formally taught in a university course. On that plaque is engraved:

We thank you for the institutional heritage you have bequeathed to us and for the example of your faith seeking understanding... from some of those who have learned Bonitatem, Disciplinam et Scientiam from you.

Those words speak for generations of

St. Michael's students, faculty, staff, and other friends of Fr. Kelly who experienced his warmth, his accessibility, his respect for them and the challenge he presented.

Every Christian is called to imitate the pattern of the death of Christ and take his or her place in the resurrection. John Kelly was called in many ways to imitate the pattern of Christ's death to self. Physical suffering was no stranger to him; he accepted it, bore it, and offered it in union with Christ for others. To give up his teaching was a suffering for him, and he experienced the lonely suffering of the difficult, but necessary, executive decisions and consequent criticism that are the burden of those in authority. Death took from him beloved members of his family, of his Basilian community and several other close friends. In the final year of his life he was called to surrender that extraordinary vigour and remarkable physical energy, as the emphysema that led to the final heart failure made physical exertion more and more difficult. He suffered frustration as his intellect remained strong, but his body could no longer respond. These were not easy days for him and the words of Paul became more and more his:

I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For him I have accepted the loss of everything, and I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ and be given a place in him.

The faith that had been the driving force of his life sustained him during this time, and in the last months of his life he was called to reproduce the

pattern of the sufferings of Christ in a more intense way. Fr. Dorsey's account of his recent visit with Fr. Kelly assures us that he answered that call as generously as he always had, and strengthens our hope that he has taken his place in Christ's resurrection.

During his last months he was supported by the affection of many who visited him, wrote him and prayed for him. He was profoundly grateful, and sorry he had not the strength to express his gratitude personally. Frs. Ted McLean and Ed Roman were of special assistance to him as was Elsie Glauwell, for many years his devoted secretary and faithful friend. But I know that all will acknowledge that no one helped him more than Jimmy Biglin, his brother-in-law with whom he spent his last days and who was an instrument of God's peace for John; to him we owe a debt we can never fully pay.

Fr. Kelly did not always warmly welcome financial audits, but he could always give an accounting of what he had received. He has been called to account for his talents. We praise and thank God for the many talents he was given and for the manner in which he used and multiplied them in the service of others. We are grateful for his presence among us and we rejoice in the destiny our faith, and his, assures us belongs to him.

One more thing, in my imagined visit to John Kelly yesterday he added another directive: Pray for me. So let us do for him what he most certainly would do for us—and most likely is doing for us right now.

May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed rest in peace.

Robert Madden, C.S.B.



Fr. Kelly's legacy of dedication to students and alumni



Editorial of *the mike*, October 1, 1986 with kind permission of the Editor

Many of those who read these lines will not have known Father John M. Kelly personally, and his passing on Friday night will have little or no direct meaning for them. Of them St. Michael's should ask no demonstrations of grief, but rather a commitment to those same goals to which Father Kelly dedicated himself.

Other writers will recall his energy, his warmth, the rewards of his friendship, but these are personal recollections which are impossible fully to share through the medium of the printed word.

Still others will celebrate the accomplishments of a distinguished career which spanned seven decades among us, yet, while it is appropriate that they do so, such historical retrospection carries with it little power to move the reader.

But Father Kelly's passing should move us, and his legacy should mean more to us than course requirements or a name on the library wall. The Father Kelly *the mike* asks all St. Michael's to recall is the man whose memory is preserved in both fond recollection of alumni, faculty and staff, and on the pages of old papers and yearbooks.

The breadth of his influence was remarkable, and every aspect of this

institution as we know it has known his touch. Father Kelly attended football games and theatrical performances as well as Mass and Collegium meetings, read *the mike* as well as Holy Scripture and Governing Council minutes, and his example holds important lessons for his posterity. His commitment to the entire community meant dedication to a wider constituency than an imagined elite, devotion to faith as well as learning, and tolerance for dissension as well as insistence upon fundamental principles.

The greatest compliment we can pay him is not grief, but harkening. For those among us denied the consolation of reminiscence, the impression left by Father Kelly upon this College represents a challenge to us as scholars and as Catholics. For him, as for the College and for ourselves, let us carry on with breadth of purpose, diversity of accomplishment, and Christian courage.



Dedication of Kelly Library, 1978

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